



MONTHLY APRIL 2006 UPDATE

◆ Legislature Supports Governor's Disability Budget

The 2006 General Assembly adjourned for another year at midnight April 10, 2006 marking the end of an often contentious legislative session. Nonetheless, the legislature approved most of the disability initiatives of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. totaling \$90 million and intended to lower the unemployment levels for people with disabilities and support more people in their communities, rather than institutions.

Both the Maryland Senate and House of Delegates rejected recommendations by a legislative analyst to cut funds for Maryland's new Medicaid Buy-In. The approved \$10.6 million will allow the State to fully implement a Medicaid Buy-In for Maryland workers with disabilities. Notification went out across the state on April 1 announcing its implementation and seeking enrollees who will be able to return to work without losing their health coverage under Medicaid. An estimated 1,500 people with disabilities in Maryland will seek re-employment under the provisions of this initiative.

All other disability-related initiatives were approved, including: funds to retrain people who have brain injuries to re-enter the workforce; funds to serve additional people on waiting lists for attendant care; funding to support the Living at Home waiver; and money to expand services to people with developmental disabilities and their families. In addition to traditional transitioning youth services, funding was also approved for a new effort focused on supporting youth with learning disabilities who enroll in community colleges.

Funding was approved to increase wages paid to direct support workers in community programs, private duty nurses under Medicaid and home health care workers, as were funds to enhance rates paid to certain mental health programs. Paratransit services will receive a boost of more than \$8 million to increase the number of drivers and call center employees and to purchase new vehicles.

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◆ Empowering People ◆

MDOD seeks members for Commission on Disabilities

The Maryland Department of Disabilities is seeking new members to fill vacancies on the Maryland Commission on Disabilities. The Commission is a vibrant and forward-thinking body charged with advising the Department on executing its duties and reorganizing state services for individuals with disabilities.

A position description and application for interested individuals can be found on MDOD's website at www.mdod.maryland.gov.

Interested individuals should send a cover letter with their resume and completed application by May 5, 2006 to: James Reinsel, Ph.D., Maryland Department of Disabilities, 217 E. Redwood Street, Suite 1300, Baltimore, MD 21202 or email to jreinsel@mdod.state.md.us.

To receive MDOD Monthly Update, email mdod@mdod.state.md.us or call 1-800-637-4113 v/tty. This document is available in alternative formats.

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor ~ Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor ~ Kristen Cox, Secretary ~ Diane McComb, Deputy Secretary

◆ MDOD Hires Director of Housing Policy

Karen Friedman has been named Director of Housing Policy at the Maryland Department of Disabilities. The Director of Housing Policy is a newly created position designed to develop and influence policies with the goal of increasing affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities.

"Housing has been identified as one of the greatest barriers for individuals with disabilities who want to live in the community, and we are excited to have a dedicated position to focus on housing policy," said **Secretary Kristen Cox** of the Maryland Department of Disabilities. "MDOD's vision in terms of housing is that individuals with disabilities will have a full array of housing options similar to their non-disabled peers."

The Director of Housing Policy will focus on the coordination and collaboration of State agencies with regard to housing for individuals with disabilities, increasing the capacity for affordable and accessible housing with long-term supports, and working with local governments to provide incentives to private builders for developing accessible and affordable housing within local communities.

Ms. Friedman joined the Governor's Office for Individuals with Disabilities in 2003 and was part of the transition team when the office was elevated to a cabinet-level department in 2004. She has served on the Constituent Services Team focusing on housing issues and has been involved in the development of MDOD's new website.

Previously, Ms. Friedman worked for the National Federation of the Blind as program manager of NFB-NEWSLINE, an electronic service that provides access to newspapers over the telephone for individuals who are unable to read conventional print. She also was involved in NFB-CORPS, a grassroots organizing program for college students who are blind or visually impaired. She has a degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois and served in the Peace Corps in Bulgaria from 1999 until 2001. She currently lives in Baltimore with her husband and newborn daughter. Contact Ms. Friedman at kfriedman@mdod.state.md.us or 410-767-3664.



Karen Friedman

◆ Disability Budget

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Although not part of the Governor's disabilities initiative, the legislature did cut \$2.5 million from the Mental Hygiene Administration that would have funded uninsured individuals. Although this cut might be mitigated by additional federal funds, administrators at the state Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, under which MHA falls, are concerned that if this additional funding does not materialize, it could lead to cuts in services. The legislature also added restrictive language to the allocation for wrap-around services, limiting it to truancy prevention efforts in the Department of Juvenile Services.

This year marked the first cross-disability budget effort by Governor Ehrlich and the Maryland Department of Disabilities. The Governor's disability budget initiatives were supported by the legislature, which demonstrated a strong commitment to the disability community, and by consumers and advocates who worked tirelessly to focus attention on the need to pass this budget intact.

◆ National Conference on the Employment of Lawyers with Disabilities

The American Bar Association (ABA) President's Office, the ABA Commission on Mental and Physical Disability Law and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) have joined forces to sponsor the first-ever American Bar Association President's Conference on the Employment of Lawyers with Disabilities on May 22 and 23, 2006 at the Renaissance Washington Hotel in Washington, DC.

This conference is appropriate for lawyers, law students, law school staff, and others in the legal profession. It represents a unique opportunity to network, exchange information and ideas, and join forces to proactively address the many issues surrounding the need to increase employment and advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The intent is to help expand opportunities for lawyers with disabilities in all legal employment sectors.

In particular, the conference will provide examples of best practices in hiring lawyers with disabilities, focus on the law pertaining to the employment of lawyers with disabilities and provide practical advice for how to set up a legal work environment to be accommodating to lawyers with disabilities. The conference will feature Richard L. Thornburgh, Esq., of Counsel, Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham, LLP, as the Keynote Speaker on May 22. Thornburgh previously served as Governor of Pennsylvania and Attorney General of the United States under two presidents. He was also instrumental in the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

For more information contact Michael J. Stratton at (202) 662-1570 or by email at cmpdl@abanet.org. Attendees are encouraged to register online at: www.abanet.org/disability/events/06/nationalconference/home.html. The deadline for advance registration is May 12, 2006.